

AN
NARRATION
OF THE
PRACTICES
OF THE
CHURCHES
IN
NEW-ENGLAND.

Written in private to one that
desired Information therein, by an Inhabitant
there, a Friend to Truth and Peace.

Published according to Order.



LONDON:

Printed in the yeare, 1651.

NOTATION

OF THE

CHURCH

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE

OF THE


OF THE

OF THE

A Brief
NARRATION
OF THE
Practises of the CHURCHES in
NEW-ENGLAND.

PREFACE.

M*Y* scope in this Declaration is onely to answer your own desire, and clear our way from some mis-apprehensions, which (I plainly see) have been suggested to you against our proceedings. What weakness may fall from my pen in this relation, impute it to my own slenderness, not to the cause in our hands. Disige & corrige, Jesu benignissime.

 Our practise in Discipline consists in these six heads especially.

1. In gathering or founding our Churches.
2. In calling Officers; as, Pastors, Teachers, Ruling Elders, Deacons.
3. In solemn Church-Worship.
4. In admitting of members.
5. In recommendations, and dismissions of members to other Churches.
6. In censuring delinquent members, by { Admonition.
Excommunication.

For the first, such as do intend to gather into Church-fellowship, do often in private meet together, and seriously examine the spiritual conditions one of another, even untill they be mutually satisfied, in the judgement of charity of the truth of grace, of each

each other, of all such as they intend to make the foundationalls of that Church: Which done, they certifie the Magistrates, and all near adjoyning Churches, of their intentions to erect a Church, and the day when they purpose to meet in publike for that end; and this is done,

1. To shew they are not ashamed of the sight.
2. To crave the help of their prayers, and the assistance of their councill in so weighty a work, being better experienced in those wayes of Chr:st then themselves as yet a c.
3. To cleare their own proceedings in their Brethrens consciences, that they seeing their entrance to be according to the Rule, may accept of them more comfortably into communion, as any occasion shall require. When the day appoynted is come, and some deputed persons sent from all the neighbour Churches (which usually are the teaching and ruling Elders) there present, and most part of that day solemnly spent in fasting and praying for a blessing upon that enterprize: Then one of them (chosen to order the work of the day) stands up and speaks to the other of the Brethren, that they may now begin to act what they met that day for, which is, to joyn together into holy fellowship, if the will and pleasure of the Lord be so, and withall, desires then, that whereas they have manifested already Gods Gracious workings upon their hearts to each other in private, now they would do the same again before the Churches in publike.

Confession.

Then himself begins, and makes confession of his faith in all the principles of Religion, and then a declaration of his effectuall calling to Chr:st, and how God hath carried on the work of grace, (*viz. Repentance from dead Works, and faith towards God, both of which they insist upon*) in his soule to that day.

Then all the rest do the like, which done, to the satisfaction of the Brethren present, they give testimony of the godly and approved life and conversation of each other.

Covenant.

See Cottons

Way in New
England, p. 8.

After this, they enter into a sacred and solemn Covenant, engagement, profession (call it what you please) whereby they Protest and promise (by the help of Chr:st) to walk together as becomes a Church of God, in all duties of holinesse before the Lord, and in all brotherly love and faithfulnessse to each other, according unto God, withall producing their Covenant, agreed on before
amongst

amongst themselves; then read it before the Assembly, and then either subscribe their hands to it, or testify by word of mouth their agreement thereto.

Then the Brethren of other Churches (some in the name of the rest) reaching forth the right hand of fellowship unto them, bear witness to their proceedings to be according to God, testify their acceptance of them into brotherly fellowship, and do exhort them also in the Lord, to proceed according to those beginnings; and so prayers made, and praises given unto God, and a Psalm sung, the blessing is pronounced, and the Congregation dissolved.

The Churches thus gathered, they look out from among themselves such who are fit for office; and if none among them be so (though usually those that joyn into a Church, have one amongst them upon whom their eye is, for such employment) they seek to the Lord of the Harvest to direct them elsewhere; and (because Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists have no successors appointed in Scripture) the ordinary officers we use to call.

1. Calling of Officers.
Acts 6. 3.

Mark. 9. 38.

Ephes. 4. 11.

are { Elders { Teaching Pastors
 { Deacons { Ruling Teachers

The pastors office properly, is to bend himself to exhortation.

The Teachers office to give himself to instruction in points of doctrine, explication of Scripture, confutation of error, &c.

Pastors.
Teachers.
Rom. 10. 14.

The ruling Elder to order the Assemblies, to look to the life and conversation of the whole Church, and to visit from house to house, to see how all thrive in godlinesse, while the other give themselves to the Word and Doctrine, and all of them together to govern the House of God, and also to prepare in private all matters for Church, and to survey the estates, and ripen all such as are to be admitted in the Church, before they produce them in publick; &c.

Ruling Elders.

The Deacons office is to have a diligent eye, to look into the necessities of the Church, and with a tender heart, and carefull hand supply them from the Church-Treasury with such things as they need for necessity, conveniency and comfort, and to see that none want, but honourably to supply them, even before they fall into any extremity, or be forced to crave help from the Church; and therefore he is.

Deacons

To

New-Englands primitive Church fellowship

To } Collect diligently
 } Keep faithfully
 } Distribute carefully }

Acts 4. 2.

the Churches treasure, that so hee may serve the Tablet, which is the proper work; the Lords Table, Ministers table, and the poors table.

Deacons

1 Tim. 3. 2.

To the Deacons office, we would adde Deaconesses, where such may be had, according to which should be widowes of the Church faithfull, approved, and full of good works, who may give themselves to works of mercy cheerfully; and to be servicable also, to those that are sick, when the Deacon so conveniently cannot, and sometime so modestly may not send their help as that sex may.

1 Pet. 4. 11.

And here behold (by the way) the faithfull and tender care of our blessed Lord, that fully provides in those officers for the necessities of all his Saints: viz. By Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, Widowes, and hath given them their names, works, and titles in his House, which are fully sufficient for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ, lesse then which would be too little, more then which would be too much; for if the minde and judgement of his Saints be well informed and instructed in what they ought to know, believe and do, (which is the work and office of the Teacher;) and if the conscience be convinced, the will bowed to holy obedience, the affections rectified and set upon their object, (which is the office and work of the pastor) if the life and conversation be well ordered also, (which is the proper employment of the ruling Elder) and if all things be beautifully ordered and governed in the House of God, in all the administration hereof, (which is the joynt work of them all together,) there and then also, if the outward man be provided for conveniently, comfortably and timely, that no lack be there, no crying and complaining in our streets for want of supply (which is the office of the Deacons,) and if the sick be helped, refreshed, comforted, (which is the office of the Deaconesse) then there is full provision for the necessity of the Saints; all which Christ hath given us here: these we have, and more then these, were like six fingers to an hand; now these (we say) and no others, being the officers which are in our eyes to call, we proceed to election, and then to ordination in this manner following.

First,

First, the men that we are to call to office, are our own members, or, if members of other Churches, they joyn with the Church which calls them; before they have any propriety in them, or power in the Lord over them, to call them to office in that body; then they are well known and approved by some convenient space of trial, seeing we must lay hands suddenly on no man; and we discern, that not only his gifts, graces, and frame of Spirit are in themselves desirable and commendable, but in some good measure also surable, and fit for that people: For every worthy man is not fit for every godly people, no more then every glove is fit for every hand, nor every key fit to open every lock, though happily it be a key of Gold, another of Iron, which is fit, may be better. They being thus approved, the Church her self, over which he is to be an overseer, calls him, and none other for them: as *Acts 14:23* those, I say, whose soules he is to take the charge of, call him, and submit themselves to his administration in the Lord, and not some of the Church, as the officers only, if there be any, or the people only, but all of us, with joynt consent, as one man, or at least the greater part, elect an officer over us: So we read that the primitive Church was carried in all their votes and elections,

1. Election.
Acts 6.
1 Tim. 5. 22.

All things thus ripened for election, when we are to elect a Pastor, Teacher, or ruling Elder, wee give notice thereof to the Magistrate, and all the next adjoyning Churches, who, and when, and to what office we ordain him unto, and intreat their presence and company with us, for their Brotherly counsell and assistance; when the day is come, and well spent in preaching, fasting, and prayer, as *Acts 13. 2. 3.* then one of themselves appoynted to oversee the work of the day, stands up, and it is enquired of the Church, if after this solemn seeking of God for his counsell and direction in that weighty work, they still resolve to proceed in the seeking such a one to be Pastor or Teacher, as before they resolved to do: Then having taken their silence for a testimony of their purpose, he tells them, now he sees all is elect for his Call, he desires the Brethren to testifie their votes, in calling such a one to such an office, by holding up their hands: which being done, he desires of the party to know if he accepts of the Call to the office which the Brethren in the name of Christ have given him

to exercise in the Church after his acceptance imposed, the Elders requires of the Church to promise solemnly by Christs help to do the duties of a Church to him, as to a Pastor or Teacher, viz. to submit to him in the Lord, to be obedient to his doctrine, to love him, to give that respect to him that Christ commands and requires: also there is the same engagement from him, to do all the duties of a Pastor or Teacher to them.

Ordination.

The Election being finished, they proceed to Ordination, which is nothing but a setting apart for, & putting him into that Office to which he is elected, and committing the whole charge into his hands, or laying it on his shoulders before the Lord, and this is done by imposition of hands and prayer. The Elders of the same Church (if there be any) do impose their hands, if there be none, but himself is the first, then two or three of the principal and most grave and eminent Christians, being required by the body, do it in the name of Christ and the Church; and this is no unuall thing in Scripture, as we conceive: Moses must bring the Levites to be consecrated before the Lord, and the children of Israel must lay their hands on them, and then Aaron shall offer them to the Lord; so also Zadock the Priest was consecrated, and Solomon anointed by the Congregation, In time of which imposition of hands,

Numb. 8. 10.

1 Chro. 29. 22.

1.

1. They pray over them for all needfull gifts and graces fit for that great place to which he is call'd.

2.

2. They speak the words themselves of Ordination of him in Christs name, and the name of that Church, to that very office.

3. Put a solemn charge upon him, as in the sight of Almighty

3 Chro. 29. 20.

God, before whom hee must shortly appeare to give an account of all those soules committed to his charge by the great Shepheard,

Num. 27. 20

Christ Jesus himselfe, that he be diligent, faithfull, carefull, and constant, in a full discharge of that great charge laid upon him.

Gal. 2. 9.

After this, the Elders of the Church, some in the name of the rest, do give him the right hand of fellowship, in the sight of all the Assembly, and testify their brotherly respect unto him: and after thankfullnesse to God for his gracious gifts bestowed on him, do exhort him in the Lord, to fulfill his ministracion received from the Lord; and so after praises given to God by him, in the name of the Church, he dissolves the Assembly with a blessing.

Deacons.

For our calling of Deacons, we judge it not necessary (because

we

we want a rule) to elect in with fasting and prayer, as in the Ordination of other Officers, but the Brethren look out from among themselves men fully qualified according to the rule of the Word, *1st. 6. 3. 1 Tim. 3. 8, 9.* and after due proof made of them, the Elders upon some Lords Day, or other publique meeting, do ordain him to the Office, and appoint him over that business by prayer, and imposition of hands.

The Church thus gathered and furnished with able helpers for edification, proceeds to all publick administrations in the body, wherein our desire and care above all things is, to have all, and no more then all the Ordinances of Christ himself; and all those (as far as God is pleased to lend light) in the native purity and simplicity, without any dressings or paintings of humane inventions. Wee use not to read in the publique Assemblies, Records or Writings of men, but (that alone, which is able to make the man of God perfectly and thoroughly furnished to all good works) the pure Word of God it self; and that all things may be done to best edification, wee use to expound and apply the Word unto the People, as occasion permits; and because we desire to sing (as well as to read) the pure Word of God, it being an Ordinance of God, as sacred as the other, we have endeavoured, according to our sight and time, to re-translate the Psalmes as neer the Originall as we could, into meeter, because the former translation was very defective, and sing them in the Churches according thereunto. For Prayer, we use not any prescribed Forms, or Printed Liturgies, but seeing the Ministers of Christ are called as well to give themselves to Prayer, as to the ministry of the Word, we pray as that blessed Index of our Prayers (who teacheth what to pray as wee ought) helping our infirmities, according to the Peoples necessities, the present occasion: and the Work of Christ in our hands requireth. Wee administer the Seals of the Covenant not to all, but only to Believers, or their seed, which are either in Covenant with our selves or with some other Church of Christ; for though wee verily believe there are many precious Saints amongst us, who with their children, are under the Covenant of Grace, through faith in Christ, whom we tenderly embrace, and esteem dear unto us, because they are so to Christ Jesus himself, and are ready to give to such approved ones, the right hand of fellowship, in case they

3 Solemn
worship.

Deut. 12. 11.

Reading.

Exposition.

Nehem. 1. 1.

Singing of
Psalm.

Prayer.

Rom. 8. 16.

shall desire it, yet seeing such are not liable and subject to the Churches censure, it is not meet they should partake of the Churches Priviledges, therefore we have hitherto forbore it, untill further light shall appear.

Sacrament of
Supper.

1 Cor. 11. 25

For the administation of the Supper, because Christ bids us do it often, wee commonly have it monethly, though we tye not our selves to any set time, but alter it as often as good reason appears; and for better remembrance of the duty, and preparation thereunto, the Elders give notice the Lords Day afore, and stirr them to an holy Preparation for so holy a duty. When the time of solemn action is come, the Pastor sets apart the Elements for so sacred employment, he blesseth the Bread, he breaketh it in the sight of all the People, declaring withall, and applying the significat'on of those holy Rites and Actions: He distributes it to those who be neer about him, and gives the rest to the Deacons hands, who stand ready (according to their office attending on the Table) to give unto all the People, not bowing or kneeling, which are forms of Worship that never came into Christs minde, so far as we know, to appoint, nor any way suitable to a Table-gesture, but in that posture of body, in which Christ himself gave it unto his Disciples: After the Bread, he taketh the Cup, and blesseth it distinctly by it self; for so our Lord Christ did, he poures out the Wine, and distributes it; this done, a Psalm is sung, Prayers returned, and the Congregation dissolved. Wee also take our liberty to solemnize holy Feasting and Fasting-days, as God gives occasion, by his extraordinary hand of Providence of speciall Mercy or Judgement, either to our selves or native Countrey, or other Churches.

Acts 6. 3

Math 26. 20

Luke 22. 27.
to 30.

Math. 26. 16

27. 29

Math. 26. 30

Addition of
Members.

1 Kings 6. 7

For the admitting of additionall Members to those that are the Fundamentals, wee proceed in this manner: Such as desire to joyn to the Church, do make known their desire to the Eldership; who take a survey of their spirituall estates, both of the knowledge in the Principles of Religion, and of the work of Grace in their hearts; as also their blamelesse and godly conversation among men, in any of which, if they finde any wounded, they plainly declare it to the parties themselves, labouring by love and patience to heal them and ripen them; where all things are clear to themselves, they propound them to the Church, and intreat them (as opportunity may serve) to take some time to deal with them, about their spirituall condition,

tion, and enquire of the Godly approved which know them, that nothing may hinder when they are called to admission: After some due space, the Ruling-Elders call them before the Church in publick, who hear them confesse their Faith in the grounds of Religion, then their effectuall Vocation to Christ: First, in their sound repen-
Confession of Faith.
 tance from dead works: Secondly, their unfeigned faith toward the Lord Jesus, *Matth. 3. 8. Luke 3. 7. Acts 8. 37.* Then, if they be satisfied in both these, (as where they discern the least true breathing of Christ, though but as smocking flax, they are) they call (if need be) for testification of their godly conversation, which being done, they rest and testifie all their consents to their admission, by holding up their hands; after that, the Pastor or Elder propounds to them the Covenant which they are to make before God and his People,
Covenant.
 the summe of which is to this effect:

To give up our selves to the Lord in all duties of holinesse; then 2 Cor. 8. 1
to the Church, and the Officers, in all love and submission, according
to the wil of God; and thus they do not trusting in their own strength,
but in the Name, and by the grace of Christ himself. To this Cove-
See Catechism way of the Churches in New-England, pag. 55. more fully expressing the Covenant.
 nant when they have given their consent, the Elders in their own name, and the Churches reciprocally, do covenant also with them, to perform the like duties back again unto them. Then after Prayers made by the whole Church, for his gracious assistance, in performing their mutuall duties each to other, and all of them to God, they depart away with a blessing.

If any Member thus admitted, hath afterward any speciall occasion to reside, for any considerable space of time, in some other Church; that we may the better know, according to our charge received of them, what becomes of our Members, he is wont to acquaint the Elders whither he goes, and the occasions of it; withall to desire them to propound to the Church for their Letters Recommendationary; which being done, the Church grants it, the scope whereof is, to testifie of the godlinesse of the man, and to desire them to receive him as becommeth a Saint, and to be helpfull to him in any thing that may need their assistance, watchfulnesse, communion, and edification in the Lord, during the time of his abode with them. The Letter is subscribed by the hands of the Elders in the name of the Church, and delivered unto them; but if any Member hath a desire to remove wholly from the Church

Of recommendation and dismission of Members.

Rom. 16. 1
1 Cor. 3. 16

go which he belongs, and to live elsewhere, he useth to make known his desire to the *Elders*, and by their hands to the Church, and where he desires to live; as also the grounds which lead him to such a remouall; which if upon examining they prove weak, or sinfull, savouring of self-will, covetousnesse, schisme, or more then of sound reason; and such are like to cast him upon eminent dangers, spirituall or temporall, then (according to their Covenant of love and faithfulness) they with tendernesse shew him his weaknesse, and dissuade him from his purpose, so prejudicial to his peace and comfort; to which counsell God usually bowes his heart to submit and stoop. But if after all the dissuasions and brotherly advice, they should see the bent of his spirit stand towards a remouall, that he cannot comfortably and fully be poysed by their judgements: In such a case, if his sin be not apparent, his danger eminent, they use some indulgence, (not willing to imprison the spirits of any) and they leave him to his liberty, and permit him to depart; and this we observe, that *when men thus depart, God follows them with the crosse, till they are driven to repent of such unadvised proceedings, and desire to return to the place which they left.*

But if they see his grounds be good and sound, and God leading him by the hand, from themselves to another place, where he may lie down comfortably and be edified, they use to say no more but as they did to *Paul*, when Gods minde appeared, to have him leave them, and go to *Jerusalem* (*the Will of the Lord be done*;) and so they write from that Church to the other, Letters of dismission, which so we call for distinctions sake, which indeed are all one with Letters of Recommendation, spoken of before, only those were for a time, these for ever; wherein they do use to give testimoniall of the brother, and intreat them to receive him in all bowels of brotherly love, as their own in the Lord, and be faithfull to his soul, untill they shall present him blamelesse to the great Shepherd the Lord *Jesus Christ*; and so after godly counsell given him to walk worthy of the Lord, in the place where he is to live, they commend him by prayer to the blessing of the word of grace. *The Church to whom he is commended, if they know not the person, make triall of him, as above, before they admit him, knowing Churches misjurre in persons as well as doctrines, &c.*

Confessing
Delinquents
Gal. 6. 1

Heb. 3. 13

March. 18.
15. 16

1 Tim. 5. 20
Mat. 18. 17

1 Tim. 5. 20

So long as the Churches Members walk blameless and holy, we encourage them, and comfort them in their godly proceedings; but in case any be fallen by temptation, (as who is exempted, if corruption prevail in, and the Lord with-draw) we pity him, and labour to regain him by such means as Christ hath prescribed; as if his sin be private, and known but to one onely, we dare not (unless the necessity of the case requireth,) communicate it to a second, but use to deal in secret with himself, and cure him of it: but if this will not serve, but either he remain unconvinced of the evil of it, (and so is likely to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin) or insensible of it, then the other takes himself bound in conscience, if the evil be apparent, to observe the rule of Christ, and gradually to proceed further with him, that is, takes one or two more with him, such as are most able, and likely to prevail with the delinquent Brother; and after prayer made to God to bow his heart; and hear his ear to attend to their admonition, they endeavour to gain him to the Lord from his sin; if this means prevail, his soul is healed, the offense removed, their love renewed: But if yet he remains impenitent, they inform the Elders, and they tell the Church, the Delinquent is converted in publick, and his sin laid open, they endeavour to regain him by opening his sin, together with the uneffectualness of the former means witnessed; by which very particular, his former sin is much aggravated upon his conscience before the Lord, from the Word applyed and pressed; all which, if ever then it shall work kindly, to the melting of his heart into godly sorrow, and humble confession, it is acceptable, and no further proceeding attempted against him.

But if none of all these worketh effectually upon him, then a solemn admonition by the vote of the whole Church, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, by the hand of the Pastor or Ruling-Elder, is sadly laid upon him; wherein his sin being set home with ground from the Word, is left upon him, as stronger Physick to purge out the distemper, which more private and gentle means would not effect.

All the while the Church (imitating the patience of our blessed Lord unto our selves) is willing to wait to see, if God at any time, by any means, will grant him repentance; which if it so be,

and

and he come forth and declare it publickly (for the plaster must be as broad as the sore) to the satisfaction of the Church, and glory of God, and shame of himself, by the humble acknowledgement of the evil of his sin, and his former impenitency, in withstanding so many precious means, so patiently used towards him, with promise by the help of Christ, for better endeavours for the time to come, the Church proceeds no further, but is satisfied, comforted, and renders praises to the God of all grace, that hath given us such free use of such precious Ordinances, and hath crowned out poor endeavours with such a blessing on the soul of his poor servant.

But if he be so far shut up under an hard heart, that he departs away impenitent, the Church accounts it, (as indeed it is) a sore blow from the hand of the Lord, not onely upon the soul of the poor brother, but upon them all, who are so neerly united unto him, and may justly make them smart, as he did all *Israel* for the sin of *Achan*.

As the Church useth these means towards him in publick, so the *Elders*, and the godly ablest brethren also, are wont (all this time) to repair to him in private, if it may be to set on the Churches Censure, and to further the working thereof; and the Church also before they proceed to further Censure, do call him before them once and again, usually, to see if the Ordinance in any measure be effectually upon him. All the while that brother (and so any other delinquent Member though not so far proceeded against by the Church as he is) stands thus offensive in the Churches eyes, he presumes not to communicate*, or if he does presume, he is deborted and prohibited, to eat of the holy bread amongst the prepared and invited guests of Christ, as not having by examination prepared himself, as all such are commanded to do, and for fear he should defile it, as the unclean under the Law did such holy flesh as they touched; for look as the Priest that was unclean, though he was not degraded from his Priesthood, yet suspended during the time of his uncleanness from meddling with the holy sacrifice; so we deal and that according to God with this unclean member; and this also we use as a further means to procure his humilisation, when he shall see himself through his own fault barred from the enjoyment of this holy privileged,

Joh. 7. 25.

Ed. 11. 12.

Numb. 16. 22.

* Though he be admitted to hearing and prayer Con-
non way of Churches,
pag. 91.

2 Chr. 29. 30.

1 Cor. 11. 28.

Hag. 2. 13. 14.

Levit. 22. 3. 4.

Agreeably to

Mat. 9. 23. 24.

priviledge, and must now sit and mourne (as the Leper under defilement,) being barred from communicating at the Table of Christ, among the holy Saints of God, which he was wont to enjoy with freedom and comfort.

But if neither the one nor the other, publique or private means are able (no not at last) to overcome his hard heart, and bring him to sound humilitation for his sin; then we judge it full time to use the last and forest means of cure that Christ hath ordained in his Church, even to cut off the gangren'd member, that the whole body be not infected by it; and to purge avay the leaven, lest the whole lump be thereby leavened; and for this we do not send to any externall authoritie out of that particular Church whereof the offender is; whether Bishop, or Claſſis; because we conceive it more then *Paul* himself; (who had more authoritie from Christ, then all the Bishops, Presbyters in the world) dare undertake, who did but *informe, direct, and stirre up* the Churches to doe it, but *did not do it himselfe*; but wee freely use the libertie and authoritie which the Lord himselfe hath given us, and doth charge us to use in such cases as these; namely, all the Church doth solemnly meet together, and if it be an open and known sin, some of other Congregations also (that they may see the Churches impartiall severitie against sin in her own members) and having set the delinquent before us, and having set out his sin in the latitude, and aggravations of it, the *Pastor* or *Elder* having propounded it to the Church, and they having testified their consents (as before for his admission, so now) for his expulsion, he solemnly in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the whole Church, delivers up that man unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, and the saving of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Which dreadfull sentence being with much fear and trembling, and yet with much power and dread denounced against him, he labours to set home the terrors of it upon his conscience; and doth charge him, though hee hath abused all other ordinances, yet to make use of this, as being the last means which Christ will use towards him for his recovery, and withall, warnes him to depart from the Assembly and the fellowship of the people of God, and withall, directs and charges the Brethren, that they so walk towards

1 Cor. 5. 6. 7.
Gal. 5. 9.

1 Cor. 14.
See Willous
Synopsi, edit
1634 p. 289
1 Cor. 5. 14.
1 Tim. 5. 22.

1 Cor. 5. 4.

1 Theſ. 5. 14.

wounds him that he may be ashamed and humbled; but what is then
his, they should not hinder, but further the working of that will-
lance upon his soul.

And though our proceedings in censure be thus slow and gradual,
as we have expressed, against him of a lesser nature and less notori-
ous, where not so much the nature and quality of sin itself, as the
impenitencie of the Delinquent hath called for the sharp censure, ac-
cording to the rule of Christ, *Matth. 18. 21, 16.* yet for sins very
scandalous and notorious, we go more quick and roundly to work
against the offender; and stay not to admonish once and again, and
then pause, to see how the plaster works; before we use the sword;
but (unless speedy and very eminent repentance, which is early steps
in to prevent, which possibly may call to us as a voyce from Hea-
ven to *Abraham*, to stay our hand) we presently, without any more
ado, meet together, and give up that man to Satan, according to that
other rule of *Paul*, *1 Cor. 5. 49. 7. 17.*

When we have thus cast him out of the Church; we have not
withal cast him out of our hearts and care, but still attend the cure
of his soul, by looking to the G O D of all grace and mercy, on
his behalf, doing by him, as they did by the Badde-man, carry him
to Christ: when finally he wants strength in go of himself, by fol-
lowing him with private admonition; to help the Physick the bet-
ter to work. And if we discern his uncircumcised heart is hum-
bled, and that he accept of the punishment of his iniquity, and con-
fesse, that is G O D hath walked contrary to him, so he hath
walked contrary to G O D and is ready to judge himself before the
Lord and his People, calling shame to himself; and giving glory to
G O D: (In a word) when we see G O D S end is attained, and
the cure of his soul effected, then (as before we called for no exte-
rall power from Bishops, or rather Presbyters to bind him, so now)
wee need no licence nor commission from any to loose him; but
the Church her self only; as we had liberty according to the rule
of the Gospel to take him in, and to cast him out; so now, we may
solve and release him from all the censure, who all being met in
Christ's Name, and persuading themselves; that as Christ unlocked
him in Heaven, so it is their duty to unlock on earth; and for their
vote being called for by the Pastor or Elders, and refused by them-
selves, he is as the Leper by the Priest of old, in the Law, pro-
nounced

See Cottons
Way of Chur-
chen in New
England, p. 92
1 Cor. 5. 11
Matth. 18. 17

Gen. 22. 10,
11, 12
Matth. 9. 1
1 Thel. 3. 14

Matth. 9. 1
1 Thel. 3. 14

Lev. 26. 19, 40

1 Cor. 2. 6, 10, 9

1 Cor. 2. 17, 8

received close, and so they (as *Paul* exhorts the *Corinthians* to do) they forgive him, they comfort him, they renew their love unto him, and now not only their Temple doors, but their armes and hearts are ready to receive him.

As the Church hath power from *Christ* over a delinquent member to reject him from their societies, so also over a scandalous officer, to deprive him of his office among them (though this we speak *de jure, non de facto*, for blessed be God, we never had any occasion to put this in practice; and we desire we never may) for as they, and they only had power from *Christ* to call one to administer unto them, so they have the same power (upon just cause given, and he making himself unworthy and unfit to perform that work they called him to, and to administer holy things with his impure hands) that when they shall see on just grounds that *Christ* himself hath disordered from ministering unto them, then they also may be *Christ's Instruments* to depose him from the office they called him unto.

In all these church-administrations, spoken in this Discourse, our *Apostle's* great desire and care is to carry all things with joy and consent of all the members, which was the practice and honour of the Primitive times, which *Paul* so much desired, should be in the Church of *Corinth*, and through Gods great goodness we have obtained that mercy that usually in all our admissions, dismissions, elections and censures, it hath been so with us to our great comfort.

But in case there should any difference arise (as possibly they may through the remaining darkness of our mindes, all not being able to see alike) then such as dissent from their Brethren and propound their grounds which either weigh in from the Word, and then it is the voice not of the Brethren only, but of *Christ* speaking in them, to which the rest submit and yeeld, or else their reasons have little or no strength in them, which the Brethren are able with ease to answer; and then either the rest see and yeeld, or if they are not convinced of the invalidity of their reasons, and the strength of their Brethrens answer, it is either through the weakness of their judgment, or the stiffness of their will, if the former be the cause, the rest lovingly inform them, and patiently bear with them, till things be in some sort cleared up, that they are content wholly to submit and consent to make no further trouble, which they are frequently

frequently taught, to do in cases of such nature, but if stiffness of will plainly appear, or a spirit of contradiction, if they will not by loving information lay down themselves, they think it meet to admonish them of pride and wilfulness, and leave them under it till they shall repent, whereby the liberty of their voyce is taken from them, till they have removed the offence.

Cottons Way
of Churches,
pag. 95.
Acts 15;

But if the cause should be weighty and dark, and the doubt great on both sides, we call in light from other churches, to whom by agreement they sepaire, and crave their counsell: This being faithfully done, by Gods ordinary blessing and presence (so our comfort we speak it) we have found it conclusive and availing.

(That which follows is added out of Mr Cottons late booke of the way of the Churches in New-England, that this Narration might be compleat.)

Hitherto of their practice in regard of each Church by it selfe, and the members of it: in the next place is to be related what the course is in respect of many Churches in communion and fellowship; and this (omitting that was said before in their mutuall assistance about the constitution of particular Churches, and recommendation of members, &c.) consists in two points generally (for we will name onely the chiefe) first, the combination into Synods or Assemblies: Secondly, Dealing with Delinquent Congregations.

For the first; When either corrupt opinions, or suspicious practices are scattered, so as they cannot well be healed by any *in Assemblies.* Church alone, the Elders of the Churches desirous to maintaine verity and unity of judgement, in matters of doctrine and integrity of life throughout the Churches, doe both acquaint the Magistrate, being nursing Fathers (amongst us) to the Church, with the necessary occasions and ends of a generall Assembly, and doe also sollicite the Churches to send some fit persons at such a time & place where the Assembly is to be held, to consider and discern of the matters in question.

The Assembly being met in the name of Christ, and his presence called for by humble & earnest prayer, the matters to be discussed are propounded

propounded by one of the *Elders* of that Church where we meet, or by some other appointed by them, and consented to by the *Assembly*. The matters propounded, the *Elders* do declare their judgement, together with their reasons from the Word.

* All which time it is free for any man present, (and all may be present, if they will) as well the *Messengers* of the Churches, as others (after leave orderly craved and obtained, to propound their doubts without offence) whence disputation doth arise (as *Acts 15.7.*) till all parties be either satisfied or convinced.

In points which are not so fully cleared and agreed upon, or the nature of them, such as may admit further discussion, difference of apprehension without dis-union of affection, or disturbance of the Churches peace is permitted, and each man is left to his *Christian liberty*; so far as they shall attain, they judge and minde one thing; if any be otherwise minded, who in simplicitie of heart seeketh the truth, and in meeknes of wisdom and love, holdeth forth the same, we hope God Will in time reveal the same unto him; in the mean time all agreeing in this one, Not to condemn nor to despise one another in differences of weaknes.

For the second, viz, the dealing with, or admonishing of offending Churches. When a scandall ariseth in a Church, whether by corruption of doctrine, or in manners; if upon diligent search it prove true, the Church hearing thereof, sendeth Letters, or Messengers, or both, unto the *Elders* of that Church, and exhorteth them to take a speedy course to the redress thereof.

But if the *Elders* prove remiss therein, (or be faulty themselves) they then certifie the whole Church thereof, to call upon their Officers, as Paul sent to the Church of Colosse, to call upon Archippus, Col. 4. 11.

If the Church hear them not, the Church offended, taketh to the help of two or three Churches more to joyn with them. If still the offending Church persist in the neglect of their duty, and of the counsell of their Brethren, either the matter would be referred to a Congregation of many or all the Churches together, (if need should require) or else if the offence be evident, and righteous, and of ill, though not of generall consequence, the Churches offended would, (as justly they might) withdraw themselves from the right band of fellowship, and so forbear all such exercises of mutuall brotherly

Act 15.7

Rom. 14.2.3

2. Admonition of delinquent Churches.

Col. 4.11

See *Way of Chri-*
stianity, cap. 6.
 Psal. 119. 145.
 175.

sharply reprehended with them; which all the Churches of Christ were
 wont to walk in one towards another. In matters of *Principles*
 of Ordinances: 2. In *Communion* with one another. 3. In *Discipline*
 matters of weight: 4. In *Praying* to one another. 5. In *Visiting* to their
 one word another: 6. In *helping* to preserve one Church which
 are (with this 7. of *Administration*) the severall acts of communion
 which we hold as Churches one with another.

And though we have never been put to the utmost extent of this
 duty, because the Lord hath so prevented, that no Church hath stood
 out so long: yet if it should so fall out (as God forbid) we look at
 it as our duty, by proportion, as one brother is bound to be faithful
 to another; and by example of the Church, Song 8. 8. who looks for
 her sister to filter that had no breasts; and of the Apostle, 1. Cor. 12. 25.
 who took care of all the Churches, which publick *profess* of grace and
 love is not dead with them; all the Churches of Christ ought to
 have a care and watchfull eye over the publick good one of another;
 though not *vizitate officio*, yet *intuitu charitatis*.

Now, let all godly-minded judge: what error or iniquity is in
 our Practice, so much cryed out upon by the sons of men, and some
 of our dear Brethren, who cry us down for *Separatists*, *Solita-*
rists, *Antichrists*, and what not? The foundations are cast down,
 and what hath she right to stand? Oh, let men shew us from the
 blessed Word of Truth, where our error lies; let them set down a
 plain Pattern before us, and we hope God will not so far leave us,
 but that he will open our eyes, and bow our hearts to entertain it;
 for if upon mature thoughts they judge this to be the very Way of
 God (as we believe verily, God is now about to clear it, to to be re-
 garded of the world); let them in the Name of God, lay away all prejudice
 against our persons and practices, and follow us so far as we follow
 Christ: So we should wish that all men were as we are, saving our
 mistakes. Does the God of all truth, and the Father of all light,
 persuade the spirits of all his precious ones, duly to prize those ways
 of Christ, and bow their hearts to accept of the *simplicity* of the Gos-
 pel of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose
 blessed bosom of love, and care, I leave them and you, ever resting

Thine and your loving Brethren.

FINIS.

